

Public Comment (submitted to the Committee by Paul Sullivan)

I was glad to have an opportunity to make a short verbal presentation to the RAC last week. Due to the meeting running a bit late, I shortened my comments. Here are my notes from what I wanted to say.

To summarize, VCS is pleased that:

1. The RAC continues holding public meetings; and we strongly support the continuation of the RAC.
2. The CDMRP scientific research is realizing highly promising results, as shown by the new CDMRP-sponsored research by Dr. Beatrice Golomb shared with the RAC. VCS strongly supports the CDMRP.
3. VA issued a new set of Gulf War reports. VCS shared our suggestions to improve the GWVIS reports (now called the pre-9/11 phase of the war). The RAC submitted a far more detailed list of suggested improvements, and VCS supports the RAC's proposal. Please thank the RAC members for their diligence on this. With robust, accurate, and timely reports, VA can develop and implement far better policies for our veterans.

In other matters, VCS still supports the urgent need to either rescind or amend Presidential Review Directive 5. That's the 1998 White House policy that promotes the use of public relations ("risk communications") to deflect concerns about post-war illnesses. In our view, science should be used first, not propaganda and spin. The issue of ending or amending PRD5 is important because DoD and VA use the same public relations tactics to claim the toxic pollution from Iraq War burn pits and the radiation from three Japanese nuclear power plant meltdowns are harmless.

VCS also hopes the RAC will continue to do outreach, issuing more press releases and performing more public events so our veterans and the public are aware of the situation facing us. The RAC is the positive exception to VA's rule of perpetuating the myth the Gulf War was fast, cheap, and low-casualty. The facts now show the Gulf War has lasted nearly 21 years (turning into the Iraq War in 2003). The financial costs for research, healthcare and disability benefits are in the billions per year and expected to reach a total of \$1 trillion over 40 years. And, sadly, there are 250,000 ill from the 1991 phase of the war without treatments or answers. Making the situation worse is the fact there are 650,000 more VA patients from the Iraq / Afghanistan war flooding into VA competing for resources.

We want to commend the RAC, as anything the RAC does is an improvement over VA's many years of inaction by most VA leaders. VCS remains disappointed that VA does such a poor job informing Gulf War veterans about research, healthcare, and benefits.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit a longer statement for the record.

Paul Sullivan

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